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ABSTRACT

With little attention paid to the way barriers to learning are addressed, many students are unable to take advantage of instructional improvements. During 1998 a nationwide coalition of organizations was established which focused on how to enhance policy cohesion in the area of barriers to student learning. This report provides information for school boards to use at the local level in order to revisit policies and issues that are reducing the impact of programs and services designed to improve instruction. School boards are encouraged to take a critical step in implementing effective reform and restructuring in schools by adding an enabling component to their model. The discussion explores (1) why school boards need to increase their focus on addressing barriers to learning; (2) the benefits accrued from addressing barriers and building in implementation processes to enable learning; (3) rethinking the school board's committee structure to build in an enhanced focus on addressing barriers to student learning; (4) lessons learned from a major school district where the board has begun the process. Diagrams and charts are provided for model processes. Materials may be reproduced for school board use. (Contains 24 references.) (EMK)

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ED 423 479

Mental Health in Schools Center Training and Technical Assistance

A Center Report . . .

Restructuring Boards of Education to Enhance Schools' Effectiveness in Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

September, 1998

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Preface

If the schools in your community have a significant number of students who are not learning and performing well, you will want to read this report.

This document stems from an initiative designed to expand the policy framework for school reform. In previous reports prepared by our Center (based on a series of regional meetings in 1996 and a national summit in 1997), policy concerns related to addressing barriers to student learning were highlighted.* During the first part of 1998, a nation-wide coalition of organizations was established focused on the need to enhance policy cohesion in this arena.** The coalition recognizes that efforts to deal with the lack of cohesive policy must occur at all systemic levels if schools and communities are to increase their effectiveness in addressing factors that interfere with students benefiting from instructional reforms.

At the local level, school boards need to revisit the many fragmented and marginalized policies that are reducing the impact of programs and services designed to enable learning. This includes ensuring reform and restructuring that encompasses an "enabling" (or "learning supports") component and treats such a component as a high priority so that efforts to address barriers to learning are woven together into a cohesive whole. At the same time, school boards must ensure this component is integrated as an essential facet of all initiatives to raise student achievement.

This report incorporates lessons learned from a unique standing committee established by the Los Angeles Unified School District's Board of Education in the mid 1990s.*** The document reflects many ideas and insights shared by members of that committee, as well as input from many others (too many to name.) We thank them all and accept full responsibility for any points with which they do not agree.

We encourage all who read this report to make copies and give them to members of school boards in their local communities.

If you are interested in discussing this topic further, please feel free to contact us.

Howard Adelman & Linda Taylor, Co-Directors

*The reports entitled *Policies and Practices for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Current Status and New Directions* and *Addressing Barriers to Student Learning: Closing Gaps in School/Community Policy and Practice* are available from the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. Our Center is one of two national training and technical assistance centers established in 1996 with partial support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Office of Adolescent Health. Our sister center is at the University of Maryland at Baltimore.

**See *Coalition for Cohesive Policy in Addressing Barriers to Development and Learning* available from our Center.

***The following were members of this standing committee during the 1997-98 school year: David Tokofsky, board member and committee chair; George Kiriyama, board member and committee co-chair; Sally Coughlin, assistant superintendent; and from the community: Howard Adelman, Yolie Flores Aguilar, Frank Binch, Frank Clark, Dorothy Fleisher, Ron Hansen, John Hatakeyama, Geri Kenyan, Helen Kleinberg, Jacquelyn McCroskey, Olivia Mitchell, Cecelia Sandoval, Sharon Watson, Andrea Zetlin.

The purpose of this report is to encourage school boards to take another critical step in reforming and restructuring schools.

The discussion explores

- why school boards need to increase their focus on addressing barriers to learning
- the benefits accrued from doing so
- building an enhanced focus on addressing barriers into a school board's committee structure
- lessons learned from a major district where the board has begun the process.

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Why School Boards Need to Increase Their Focus on Addressing Barriers to Learning

Barriers to learning

Across the country, many students fail to benefit from improved instruction because of a host of interfering factors. The litany is all too familiar to anyone who works in schools. Putting aside internal causes that can lead to learning and behavior problems, a host of external barriers can and do interfere with learning and teaching. Besides language and cultural considerations and frequent school changes, teachers are confronted more than ever before with violence and drug use. School boards, superintendents, principals, and teachers everywhere are eager for ideas on how to address these concerns more effectively (e.g., see Lowe, Hantman-Lanphear, & Clemons, 1997; Royer, 1996; Sroka, 1998; Vail, 1996).

Unfortunately, most districts handle barriers to student learning in a piecemeal and fragmented manner. Even at schools pursuing major reforms, the predominant focus is on improving instruction and school management, with little attention paid to improving the ways barriers are addressed (e.g., see Anderson, 1998). As a result, too many students are unable to truly take advantage of instructional improvements. This is a central paradox of school reform. Resolving the paradox is one of the most critical tasks confronting school boards and all others who are concerned with improving student achievement and performance.

How many are affected?

Figures vary. Harold Hodgkinson, who is director of the Center for Demographic Policy, estimates that 40% of young people are in very bad educational shape and at risk for failing to fulfill their promise. Obviously, in certain schools the percentage is much smaller, and unfortunately in many urban schools the reality is that over 50% manifest significant learning, behavior, or emotional problems. These problems stem from restricted opportunities associated with poverty, difficult and diverse family circumstances, lack of English language skills, violent neighborhoods, and inadequate health care. Until the barriers hindering the performance and learning of these students are addressed effectively, average achievement test scores for many schools and districts will change little, and efforts to improve instruction will be judged a failure.

What's needed?

While emphasis on higher standards, higher expectations, assessment, waivers, accountability, and no excuses is important, such demands are not enough to turn around schools where large numbers of students are performing poorly. In such settings, there also is a need for comprehensive, multifaceted approaches for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. However, as stressed in our Center's 1996 and 1997 policy reports (based on a series of regional meetings and a national summit), there is growing concern about serious flaws in prevailing initiatives for ameliorating learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems.

Missing: an explicit policy framework

A major trend across the country is to encourage increased *collaboration* within schools, among schools, between schools and community agencies, and among agencies at local, state, and federal levels. The intent is to enhance immediate cooperation and coordination and eventually increase *integrated use of resources*. The hope is that all this will lead to better use of limited resources. Another implicit hope is that collaboration will lead to *comprehensive services*. There is, however, *no explicit policy framework* for a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development. This point is underscored by the current situation at district and school levels where

- little attention is paid to restructuring the education support programs and services that schools own and operate
- little attention is paid to doing more than co-locating a few community health and human services at select school sites
- little attention is paid to weaving school owned resources and community owned resources into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and well-integrated approach.

Thus, *developing comprehensive approaches to address barriers to learning continues to be a low priority* in both policy and practice. Given this state of affairs, the problem is how to elevate the level of priority policy makers assign to establishing and maintaining such approaches. Obviously, school boards play a key role in all this.

Marginalized... Fragmented

As districts move to enhance their effectiveness in countering factors that interfere with students benefiting from instructional reforms, they must take stock of the current state of affairs. In many districts, a school-by-school analysis will show most sites are addressing a relatively small proportion of students who manifest learning, behavior, and emotional problems. And, most programs and services are directed at severe problems and responding to crises. Early-after-onset interventions are rare. Prevention remains an unfulfilled dream. Moreover, efforts generally are fragmented and, of even greater consequence, are *marginalized* in policy and daily practice. This marginalized status is reflected in the fact that so many of the interventions are discrete and time-limited "soft" money projects.

Initiatives focused on integrated services and school-linked services are insufficient

As noted above, recent initiatives mostly focus on (a) developing "integrated services" to counter fragmentation and reduce redundancy, waste, and lack of effectiveness and (b) linking community services to schools in order to increase student/family access. In this context, concerns are raised about piecemeal, categorically funded approaches, such as those created specifically to reduce substance abuse, violence, school dropouts and expulsions, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and so forth. Ironically, initiatives to foster "school-linked services" may increase fragmentation by co-locating community services on campuses without taking steps to integrate them with existing school programs and services. Moreover, with the dearth of services available in poor communities, increased access benefits relatively few youngsters.

End the marginalized status of efforts to address barriers

Although service fragmentation and access are significant concerns, they are not the most basic ones with respect to addressing barriers to learning. To date, the impact of initiatives for integrated services has been relatively minor. And by concentrating so heavily on fostering integrated school-linked services, policy makers fail to deal with the broader problem. As long as this is the case, reforms to reduce fragmentation and increase access are seriously hampered. Indeed, it is unlikely these concerns can be resolved appropriately without ending the marginalized status of efforts to address barriers to development, learning, and teaching. More to the point, the desired impact on the learning and performance of large numbers of students will not be achieved and desired increases in achievement test score averages will remain elusive.

Needed: A Policy Framework for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Given that external factors are primarily responsible for the majority of learning, behavior, and emotional problems encountered each day, why don't schools pay greater attention to factors that create barriers to learning? Mostly because of what's missing in the dominant models for school reform. Analyses of legislative initiatives and guidelines indicate a dearth of focus on *fundamentally restructuring* resources currently allocated to address barriers. School reformers seem content simply to refer in passing to the potential value of integrated health and social services and school-based centers.

Because the focus on addressing barriers is so marginalized, schools devote relatively little serious attention to restructuring their activity in this arena and do not integrate the activity with school reforms. This neglect is seen in the lack of mapping, analyzing, and rethinking resource allocation related to addressing barriers. It is evident in the lack of attention given this matter in consolidated plans and program quality reviews. It is apparent in the token way these concerns are dealt with in inservice education agendas for administrative and line staff; and on and on. (Review, for example, issues of *The American School Board Journal*.)

Policy must foster a full continuum of integrated systems to enable learning

As a result, schools continue to operate with virtually no comprehensive frameworks to guide thinking about *potent* programs for addressing barriers. Comprehensive frameworks are needed to shape development of a continuum of intervention systems focused on individual, family, and environmental barriers. Such a continuum includes systems of prevention, systems of early intervention to address problems as soon after onset as feasible, and systems of care for those with chronic and severe problems (see Appendix). From this perspective, a policy emphasis on developing these systems and implementing them seamlessly is the key not only to unifying fragmented activity, but to using all available resources in the most productive manner.

District policy and practice must undergo a major transformation to ensure significant reform and restructuring of resources so more students can benefit from instructional improvements. As described in the Appendix, effectively addressing barriers to learning involves adopting a framework for comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approaches. Such a framework must be pursued as a primary and essential component of the reform agenda at the district level and at each school and must be well-integrated with ongoing strategies to improve instruction and management.

Policy also must delineate basic areas for developing school-wide approaches for addressing barriers to learning

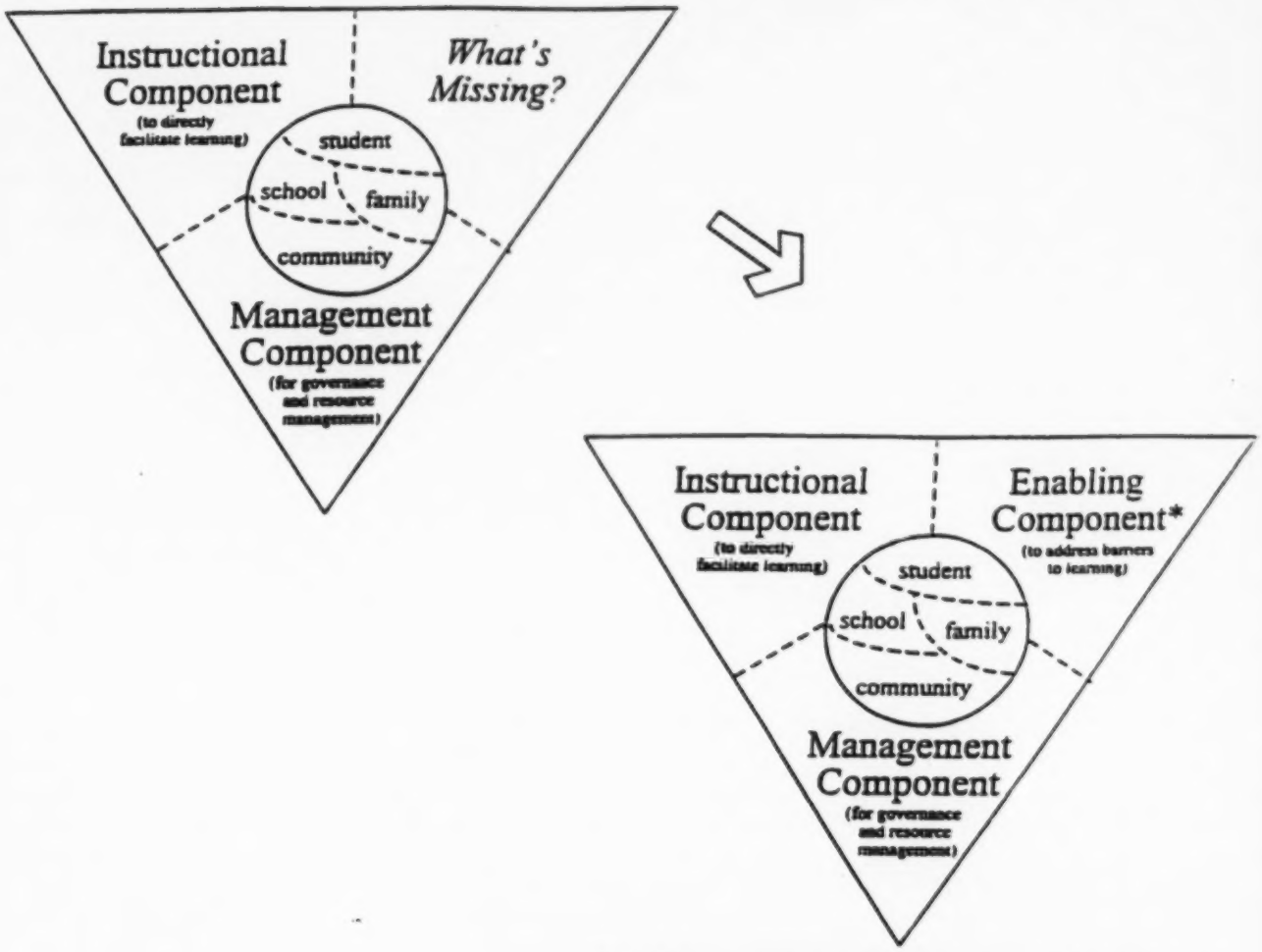
Clearly, the prevailing framework for school reform is too limited. Developing comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approaches requires *more than* outreach to link with community resources (and certainly more than adopting a school-linked services model), *more than* coordinating school-owned services, *more than* coordinating school services with community services, and *more than* creating Family Resource Centers and Full Service Schools. None of these constitute school-wide approaches, and the growing consensus is that school-wide approaches are essential. Unfortunately, when it comes to addressing barriers to learning, schools have no guidelines delineating basic areas around which to develop school-wide approaches. Thus, it is not surprising that current reforms are not generating potent, multifaceted, integrated approaches.

Current policy overrelies on a two component model for improving student learning & performance

Documented failures of prevailing paradigms for educational reform over the last thirty years suggest it is time for a basic policy shift. As highlighted in Figure 1, such a shift should encompass moving from the inadequate two component model that dominates school reform to a three component framework. The three component model outlined calls for elevating efforts to address barriers to development, learning, and teaching to a high level of policy focus.

There is no way to avoid the fact that better achievement requires more than good instruction and well-managed schools. Also essential is an enabling component that comprehensively addresses barriers, and this component must be treated as a fundamental facet of educational reform. When policy and practice are viewed through the lens of this third component, it becomes evident how much is missing in current efforts to enable learning. The concept of an enabling component provides a critical frame of reference for generating reforms that ensure *all* young people *truly* have the opportunity to learn at school.

Figure 1. Moving from a two to a three component model of or reform and restructuring.



*The third component (an enabling component) is established in policy and practice as primary and essential and is developed into a comprehensive approach by weaving together school and community resources.

The Concept of an Enabling Component

As suggested above, the concept of an enabling component provides a basis for combating marginalization and a focal point for developing a comprehensive policy and practice framework. It can also help counter fragmentation by providing a unifying term to encase the disparate approaches used in dealing with psychosocial concerns. In this respect, it is noted that the concept encompasses models calling for integrated services and full-service schools and *goes well beyond them* by fully merging with school reform. While some service-dominated models describe themselves as comprehensive, services alone cannot enable learning in the ways that are essential to the success of school reform.

A cohesive framework for weaving resources together

Emergence of a cohesive enabling component requires policy reform and operational restructuring that allow for weaving together what is available at a school, expanding this through integrating school, community, and home resources, and enhancing access to community resources by linking as many as feasible to programs at the school. This involves extensive restructuring of school-owned enabling activity, such as pupil services and special and compensatory education programs, and doing so in ways that truly integrate the enabling, instructional, and management components. In the process, mechanisms must be developed to coordinate and eventually integrate school-owned enabling activity and school and community-owned resources. These include assets in the home and in the business and faith communities, as well as all available resources for enrichment and recreation. And as clusters of schools work together (e.g., high schools and their middle and elementary feeder schools), they create additional opportunities to integrate and expand resources and achieve economies of scale.

The usefulness of the concept of an enabling component as a broad unifying focal point for policy and practice is evidenced in its adoption by the California Department of Education (whose version is called *Learning Supports*) and by one of the New American School's design teams (Anderson, 1998; Urban Learning Center Model, 1996). It also is attracting attention in various states and localities around the country.

Addressing barriers is not a separate agenda from a school's instructional mission. As illustrated in Figure 2, currently in many schools a significant portion of students encounter barriers that interfere with their benefiting from instruction. Addressing such barriers is a necessary precondition if *all* students are to succeed.

Six basic areas for addressing barriers

From this perspective, all categorical programs can be integrated, in policy and practice, into a comprehensive component for addressing barriers. Analyses indicate that schools can build such an enabling component by developing programs in six basic areas (see Figure 2 and Exhibit 1). Work carried out in the context of school reform indicates that delineating these six areas for schools can foster comprehensive, integrated, school-wide approaches (Adelman, 1996a, 1996b; Adelman & Taylor, 1994, 1997a, 1997b; California Department of Education, 1996, 1997; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1996; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997; Urban Learning Center, 1996).

Figure 2. A model for an enabling component at a school site.

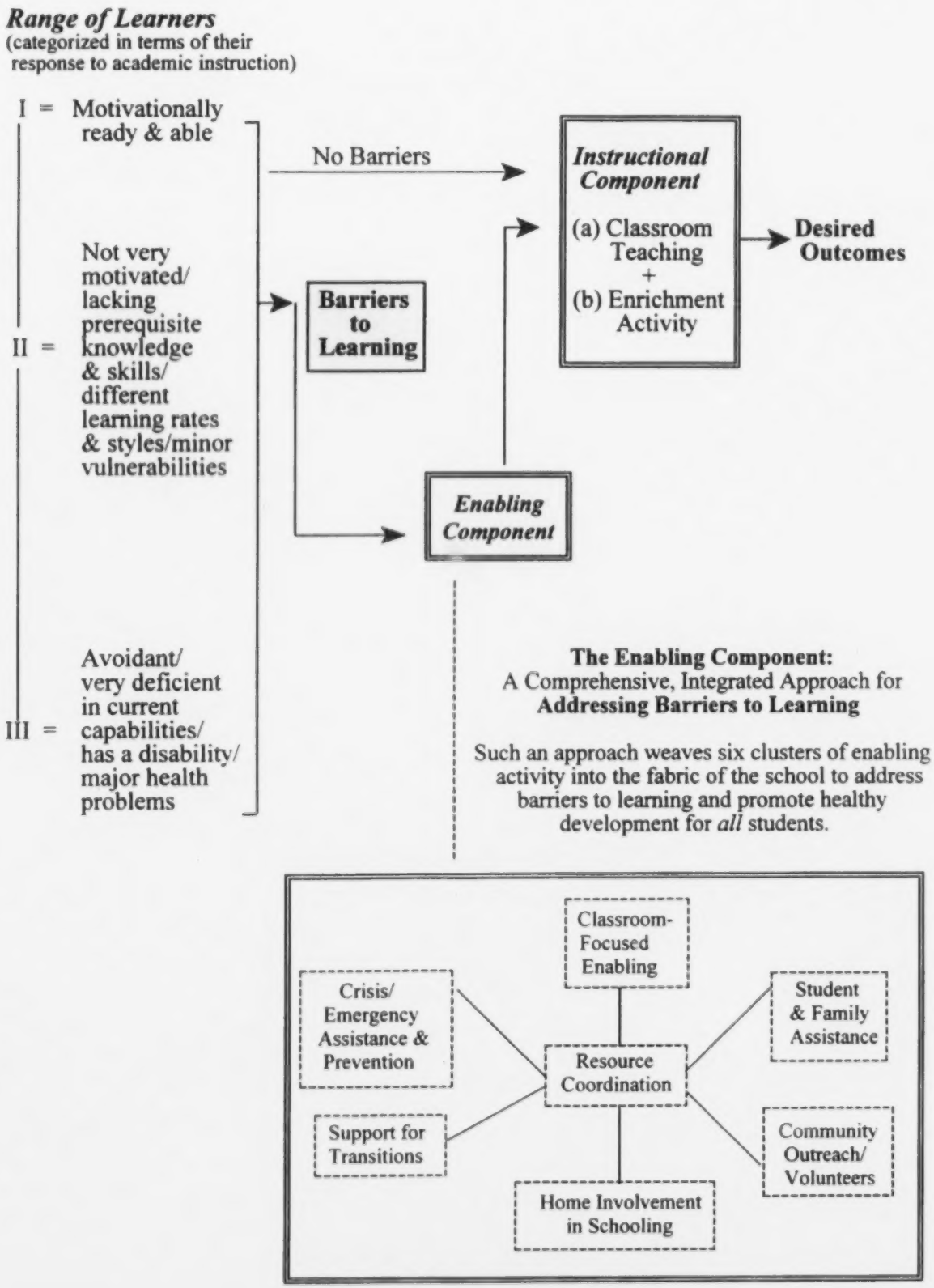

Range of Learners
(categorized in terms of their response to academic instruction)
I = Motivationally ready & able
II = Not very motivated/ lacking prerequisite knowledge & skills/ different learning rates & styles/minor vulnerabilities
III = Avoidant/ very deficient in current capabilities/ has a disability/ major health problems
No Barriers
Barriers to Learning
Instructional Component
(a) Classroom Teaching
+
(b) Enrichment Activity
Desired Outcomes
Enabling Component
The Enabling Component:
A Comprehensive, Integrated Approach for Addressing Barriers to Learning
Such an approach weaves six clusters of enabling activity into the fabric of the school to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development for all students.
Classroom-Focused Enabling
Crisis/ Emergency Assistance & Prevention
Student & Family Assistance
Resource Coordination
Support for Transitions
Community Outreach/ Volunteers
Home Involvement in Schooling

Exhibit 1

Six Interrelated Clusters of Enabling Activity

I. ***Classroom Focused Enabling -- enhancing classroom-based efforts to enable learning***

When a teacher has difficulty working with a youngster, the first step is to address the problem within the regular classroom and perhaps with added home involvement. The emphasis is on enhancing classroom-based efforts that enable learning by increasing teacher effectiveness for preventing and handling problems. Personalized help is provided to increase a teacher's array of strategies for working with a wider range of individual differences. For example, teachers learn to use volunteers and peer tutoring to enhance social and academic support and to increase their range of accommodative strategies and their ability to teach students compensatory strategies. As appropriate, support *in the classroom* is provided by resource and itinerant teachers and counselors. Work in this area requires (a) programs for personalized professional development, (b) systems to expand resources, (c) programs for temporary out of class help, and (4) programs to develop aides, volunteers, and any others who help in classrooms or who work with teachers to enable learning. Through classroom-focused enabling programs, teachers are better prepared to address similar problems when they arise in the future. (The classroom curriculum already should encompass a focus on fostering socio-emotional and physical development; such a focus is seen as an essential element in preventing learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems.) Besides enabling learning, two aims of all this work are to increase mainstreaming efficacy and reduce the need for special services by linking with instructional reform to increase student achievement.

II. ***Crisis Assistance and Prevention***

Schools must respond to, minimize the impact of, and prevent crises. This requires (a) systems and programs for emergency/crisis response at a site, throughout a school complex, and community-wide (including a program to ensure follow-up care) and (b) prevention programs for school and community to address school safety and violence reduction, suicide prevention, child abuse prevention and so forth. Desired outcomes of crisis assistance include ensuring immediate emergency and follow-up care is provided so students are able to resume learning without undue delay. Prevention activity outcomes are reflected in indices showing there is a safe and productive environment and that students and their families have the type of attitudes and capacities needed to deal with violence and other threats to safety.

III. ***Support for Transitions***

A variety of transitions concerns confront students and their families. A comprehensive focus on transitions requires planning, developing, and maintaining (a) programs to establish a welcoming and socially supportive school community, especially for new arrivals, (b) counseling and articulation programs to support grade-to-grade and school-to-school transitions, moving to and from special education, going to college, moving to post school living and work, and (c) programs for before and after-school and intersession to enrich learning and provide recreation in a safe environment. Anticipated outcomes are reduced alienation and increased positive attitudes and involvement related to school and various learning activities.

(cont.)

IV. ***Home Involvement in Schooling***

Work in this area includes (a) programs to address specific learning and support needs of adults in the home, such as ESL classes and mutual support groups, (b) programs to help those in the home meet their basic obligations to the student, such as providing them with instruction for parenting and for helping with school-work, (c) systems to improve communication about matters essential to the student and family, (d) programs to enhance the home-school connection and sense of community, (e) interventions to enhance participation in making decisions that are essential to the student's well-being, (f) programs to enhance home support related to the student's basic learning and development, (g) interventions to mobilize those at home to problem solve related to student needs, and (h) intervention to elicit help (support, collaborations, and partnerships) from those at home with respect to meeting classroom, school, and community needs. The context for some of this activity may be a *parent center* (which may be part of a *Family Service Center* facility if one has been established at the site). Outcomes include indices of parent learning, student progress, and community enhancement specifically related to home involvement.

V. ***Community Outreach for Involvement and Support (including a focus on volunteers)***

Outreach to the community is to build linkages and collaborations, develop greater involvement in schooling, and enhance support for efforts to enable learning. Outreach is made to (1) public and private community agencies, universities, colleges, organizations, and facilities, (2) businesses and professional organizations and groups, and (3) volunteer service programs, organizations, and clubs. Activity includes (a) programs to recruit community involvement and support (e.g., linkages and integration with community health and social services; cadres of volunteers, mentors, and individuals with special expertise and resources; local businesses to adopt-a-school and provide resources, awards, incentives, and jobs; formal partnership arrangements), (b) systems and programs specifically designed to train, screen, and maintain volunteers (e.g., parents, college students, senior citizens, peer and cross-age tutors and counselors, and professionals-in-training to provide direct help for staff and students -- especially targeted students), (c) programs outreaching to hard to involve students and families (those who don't come to school regularly -- including truants and dropouts), and (d) programs to enhance community-school connections and sense of community (e.g., orientations, open houses, performances and cultural and sports events, festivals and celebrations, workshops and fairs). Outcomes include indices of community participation, student progress, and community enhancement.

VI. ***Student and Family Assistance***

Student and family assistance should be reserved for the relatively few problems that cannot be handled without adding special interventions. The emphasis is on providing special services in a personalized way to assist with a broad-range of needs. To begin with, available social, physical and mental health programs in the school and community are used. As community outreach brings in other resources, they are linked to existing activity in an integrated manner. Special attention is paid to enhancing systems for triage, case and resource management, direct services to meet immediate needs, and referral for special services and special education resources and placements as appropriate. Ongoing efforts are made to expand and enhance resources. Work in this area requires (a) programs designed to support classroom focused enabling -- with specific emphasis on reducing the need for teachers to seek special programs and services, (b) a stakeholder information program to clarify available assistance and how to access help, (c) systems to facilitate requests for assistance and strategies to evaluate the requests (including use of strategies designed to reduce the need for special intervention), (d) a programmatic approach for handling referrals, (e) programs providing direct service, (f) programmatic approaches for effective case and resource management, and (g) interface with community outreach to assimilate additional resources into current service delivery. As major outcomes, the intent is to ensure special assistance is provided when necessary and appropriate and that such assistance is effective.

Note about *resource "coordination"* at a school site: Just as a school board needs a mechanism to focus on policy and practice related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching, so does every school. Such a mechanism involves the site administrator and key staff in the tasks of mapping and analyzing resources and transforming them into an effective school-wide enabling (or learning supports) component.

What Are the Benefits of Enhancing the Focus on Addressing Barriers to Learning?

The most fundamental benefits to be accrued from school boards increasing their focus on these concerns are enhanced educational results

As with all school reform, the first and foremost concern for school boards is improving student academic performance and achievement. The reality is that the best instructional reforms cannot produce the desired results for a large number of students as long as schools do not have comprehensive approaches for addressing external and internal barriers to learning and teaching. And, it is evident that schools are not developing such approaches because current policy marginalizes and fragments the emphasis on these matters.

In reviewing the value of their board committee for enhancing a focus on addressing barriers to learning, committee members in the Los Angeles Unified School District stressed that their work contributed to

- formulation of a major policy framework and specific recommendations for ways to improve district efforts to address barriers to student learning and enhance healthy development
- ongoing monitoring of and pressure for progress related to district reforms for addressing barriers (e.g., early intervention as a key aspect for dealing with the problems of social promotion, expulsion, dropout, and growing numbers referred for special education)

...and there are other benefits as well

- provision of a morale-boosting open forum for line staff and community to hear about proposed changes, offer ideas, and raise concerns
- connecting community agency resources to the district and sensitizing agency staff to district concerns in ways that contribute to improved networking among all concerned
- regular access by board members and district staff, *without fees,* to an array of invaluable expertise from the community to explore how the district should handle complex problems arising from health and welfare reforms and the ways schools should provide learning supports
- expanding the informed cadre of influential advocates supporting district reforms

All these benefits were seen by the committee members as important reasons for carrying on the work.

Rethinking a School Board's Current Committee Structure

Most school boards do not have a standing committee that gives full attention to the problem of how schools address barriers to learning and teaching. This is not to suggest that boards are ignoring such matters. Indeed, items related to these concerns appear regularly on every school board's agenda. The problem is that each item tends to be handled in an ad hoc manner, without sufficient attention to the "Big Picture." One result is that the administrative structure in most districts is not organized in ways that coalesce its various functions (programs, services) for addressing barriers. The piecemeal structure reflects the marginalized status of such functions and both creates and maintains the fragmented policies and practices that characterize efforts to address barriers to student learning.

Analyzing How the Board's Committee Structure Handles Functions Related to Addressing Barriers

Given that every school endeavors to address barriers to learning and teaching, school boards should carefully analyze how their committee structure deals with these functions. Because boards already have a full agenda, such an analysis probably will require use of an ad hoc committee. This committee should be charged with clarifying whether the board's structure, time allotted at meetings, and the way the budget and central administration are organized allow for a thorough and cohesive overview of all functions schools pursue to enable learning and teaching. In carrying out this charge, committee members should consider work done by pupil services staff (e.g., psychologists, counselors, social workers, attendance workers, nurses), compensatory and special education, safe and drug free schools programs, dropout prevention, aspects of school readiness and early intervention, district health and human service activities, initiatives for linking with community services, and more. Most boards will find (1) they don't have a big picture perspective of how all these functions relate to each other, (2) the current board structure and processes for reviewing these functions do not engender a thorough, cohesive approach to policy, and (3) functions related to addressing barriers to learning are distributed among administrative staff in ways that foster fragmentation.

If this is the case, the board should consider establishing a standing committee that focuses indepth and consistently on the topic of how schools in the district can enhance their efforts to improve instruction by addressing barriers in more cohesive and effective ways.

What a Standing Committee Needs to Do

The primary assignment for the committee is to develop a comprehensive policy framework to guide reforms and restructuring so that *every school* can make major improvements in how it addresses barriers interfering with the performance and learning of its students. Developing such a framework requires revisiting existing policy with a view to making it more cohesive and, as gaps are identified, taking steps to fill them.

Mapping

Current policies, practices, and resources must be well-understood. This requires using the lens of addressing barriers to learning to do a complete mapping of all district owned programs, services, personnel, space, material resources, cooperative ventures with community agencies, and so forth. The mapping process should differentiate between (a) regular, long-term programs and short-term projects, (b) those that have the potential to produce major results and those likely to produce superficial outcomes, and (c) those designed to benefit all or most students at every school site and those designed to serve a small segment of the district's students. In looking at income, in-kind contributions, and expenditures, it is essential to distinguish between "hard" and "soft" money (e.g., the general funds budget, categorical and special project funds, other sources that currently or potentially can help underwrite programs). It is also useful to differentiate between long- and short-term soft money. It has been speculated that when the various sources of support are totaled in certain schools as much as 30% of the resources may be going to addressing barriers to learning. Reviewing the budget through this lens is essential in moving beyond speculation about such key matters.

Analysis

Because of the fragmented way policies and practices have been established, there tends to be inefficiency and redundancy, as well as major gaps in efforts to address barriers to learning. Thus, a logical focus for analysis is how to reduce fragmentation and fill gaps in ways that increase effectiveness and efficiency. Another aspect of the analysis involves identifying activities that have little or no effects; these represent resources that can be redeployed to help underwrite the costs of filling major gaps.

Formulation of a policy framework and specific proposals for systemic reforms

A framework offering a picture of the district's total approach for addressing barriers to learning should be formulated to guide long-term strategic planning. A well-developed framework is an essential tool for evaluating all proposals in ways that minimize fragmented and piecemeal approaches. It also provides guidance in outreaching to link with community resources in ways that fill gaps and complement school programs and services. That is, it helps avoid creating a new type of fragmentation by clarifying cohesive ways to weave school and community resources together.

Formulate specific proposals to ensure the success of systemic reforms

The above tasks are not simple ones. And even when they are accomplished, they are insufficient. The committee must also develop policy and restructuring proposals that enable substantive systemic changes. These include essential capacity building strategies (e.g., administrative restructuring, leadership development, budget reorganization, developing stakeholder readiness for changes, well-trained change agents, strategies for dealing with resistance to change, initial and ongoing staff development, monitoring and accountability). To achieve economies of scale, proposals can capitalize on the natural connections between a high school and its feeders (or a "family" of schools). Centralized functions should be redefined and restructured to ensure that central offices/units support what each school and family of schools is trying to accomplish.

Committee Composition

The nature and scope of the work call for a committee that encompasses

- one or more board members who chair the committee (all board members are welcome and specific ones are invited to particular sessions as relevant)
- district administrator(s) in charge of relevant programs (e.g., student support services, Title I, special education)
- several key district staff members who can represent the perspectives of principals, union members, and various other stakeholders
- nondistrict members whose jobs and expertise (e.g., public health, mental health, social services, recreation, juvenile justice, post secondary institutions) make them invaluable contributors to the tasks at hand .

To be more specific:

It helps if more than one board member sits on the committee to minimize proposals being contested as the personal/political agenda of a particular board member.

Critical information about current activity can be readily elicited through the active participation of a district admin-

istrator (e.g., a deputy/associate/assistant superintendent) responsible for "student support programs" or other major district's programs that address barriers to learning.

Similarly, a few other district staff usually are needed to clarify how efforts are playing out at schools across the district and to ensure that site administrators, line staff, and union considerations are discussed. Also, consideration should be given to including representatives of district parents and students.

Finally, the board should reach out to include members on the standing committee from outside the district who have special expertise and who represent agencies that are or might become partners with the district in addressing barriers to learning. For example, in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the committee included key professionals from post secondary institutions, county departments for health, and social services, public and private youth development and recreation organizations, and the United Way. The organizations all saw the work as highly related to their mission and were pleased to donate staff time to the committee.

Ensuring the Committee's Efforts Bear Fruit

The committee's efforts will be for naught if the focus of their work is not a regular topic on the board's agenda and a coherent section of the budget. Moreover, the board's commitment must be to addressing barriers to learning in powerful ways that enable teachers to be more effective -- as contrasted to a more limited commitment to providing a few mandated services or simply increasing access to community services through developing coordinated/integrated school-linked services.

Given the nature and scope of necessary changes and the limited resources available, the board probably will have to ask for significant restructuring of the district bureaucracy. (Obviously, the aim is not to create a larger central bureaucracy.) It also must adopt a realistic time frame for fully accomplishing the changes.

Lessons Learned

Based on work in this area, it seems worth underscoring a few key problems that should be anticipated. In doing so, we also suggest some strategies to counter them. Not surprisingly, the problems are rather common ones associated with committee and team endeavors. Since most could be minimized, it is somewhat surprising how often no plans are made to reduce their impact.

Agreement about the committee's goals and timeline

Although a statement of general purpose usually accompanies its creation, such committees tend to flounder after a few meetings if specific steps for getting from here to there are not carefully planned and articulated. In the longer run, the committee is undermined if *realistic* timelines are not attached to expectations regarding task accomplishments.

> Possible strategy: Prior to the first meeting a subgroup could draft a statement of long-term aims, goals for the year, and immediate objectives for the first few meetings. Then, they could delineate steps and timelines for achieving the immediate objectives and goals for the year. This "strategic plan" could then be circulated to members for amendment and ratification.

Agenda setting

Those who set the agenda control what is accomplished. Often such agendas do not reflect a strategic approach for major policy and systemic reforms. The more ambitious the goals, the more difficult it is to work in a systematic manner. Committees have difficulty doing first things first. For example, the first step is to establish a big picture policy framework; then specifics can be fleshed out. In fleshing out specifics, the first emphasis is on restructuring and redeploying poorly used resources; this work provides the context for exploring how to enhance resources.

> Possible strategy: The committee could delegate agenda setting to a small subgroup who are perceived as having a comprehensive understanding of the strategic process necessary for achieving the committee's desired ends.

Keeping on task

It is very easy to bog the committee's work down by introducing distractions and through poor meeting facilitation. Bogging things down can kill members' enthusiasm; conversely, well-run and productive meetings can generate long-term commitment and exceptional participation. Matters that can make the process drag along include the fact that committee members have a great deal to learn before they can contribute effectively. Nondistrict members often require an introductory "course" on schools and school culture. District members usually require a similar introduction to the ABCs of community agencies and resources. Staff asked to describe a program are inclined to make lengthy presentations. Also, there are a variety of immediate concerns that come to the board that fall under the purview and expertise of such a standing committee (e.g., ongoing proposals for programs and resource allocation, sudden crises).

> Possible strategy: The key to appropriately balancing demands is careful agenda setting. The key to meetings that effectively move the agenda forward is firm facilitation that is implemented gently, flexibly, and with good humor. This requires assigning meeting facilitation to a committee member with proven facilitation skills or, if necessary, recruiting a non committee member who has such skills.

Working between meetings

When committees meet only once a month or less often, it is unlikely that proposals for major policy and systemic reforms will be forthcoming in a timely and well-formulated manner.

> Possible strategy: Subgroups of the committee can be formed to work between meetings. These work groups can accomplish specific tasks and bring the products to the full committee for amendment and ratification. Using such a format, the agenda for scheduled committee meetings can be streamlined to focus on refining work group products and developing guidelines for future work group activity.

Avoiding Fragmentation

As Figure 3 highlights, the functions with which the committee is concerned overlap the work of board committees focusing on instruction and the governance and management of resources. Unless there are effective linkages between committees, fragmentation is inevitable.

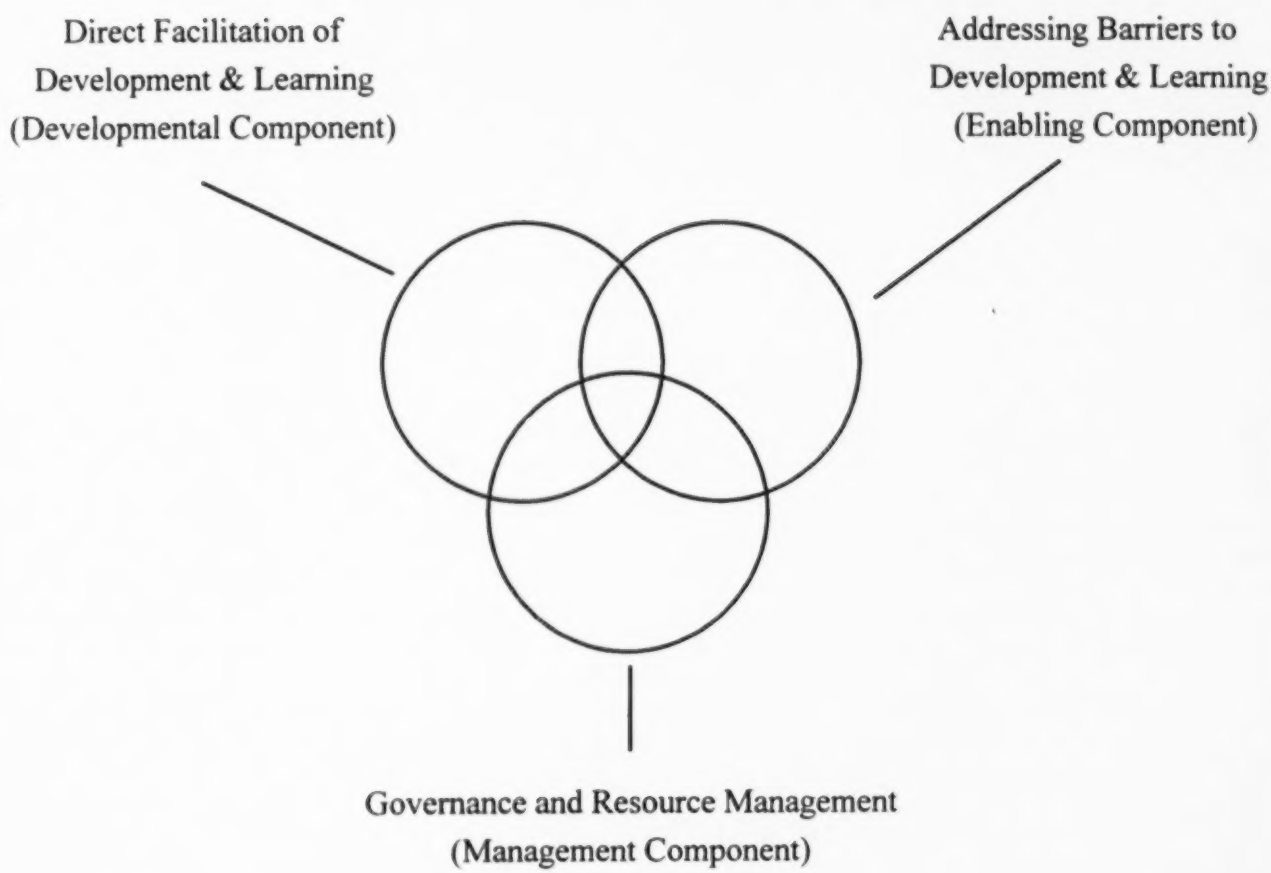
> Possible strategy: Circulating all committee agendas and minutes; cross-committee participation or joint meetings when overlapping interests are on the agenda.

Minimizing political and interpersonal machinations

Obviously, school boards are political entities. Therefore, besides common interpersonal conflicts that arise in most groups, differences in ideology and constituent representation can interfere with a committee accomplishing its goals.

Possible strategy: At the outset, it is wise to identify political and interpersonal factors that might undermine acceptance of the committee's proposals. Then steps can be taken to negotiate agreements with key individuals in order to maximize the possibility that proposals are formulated and evaluated in a nonpartisan manner.

Figure 3. Functional Focus for Reform and Restructuring



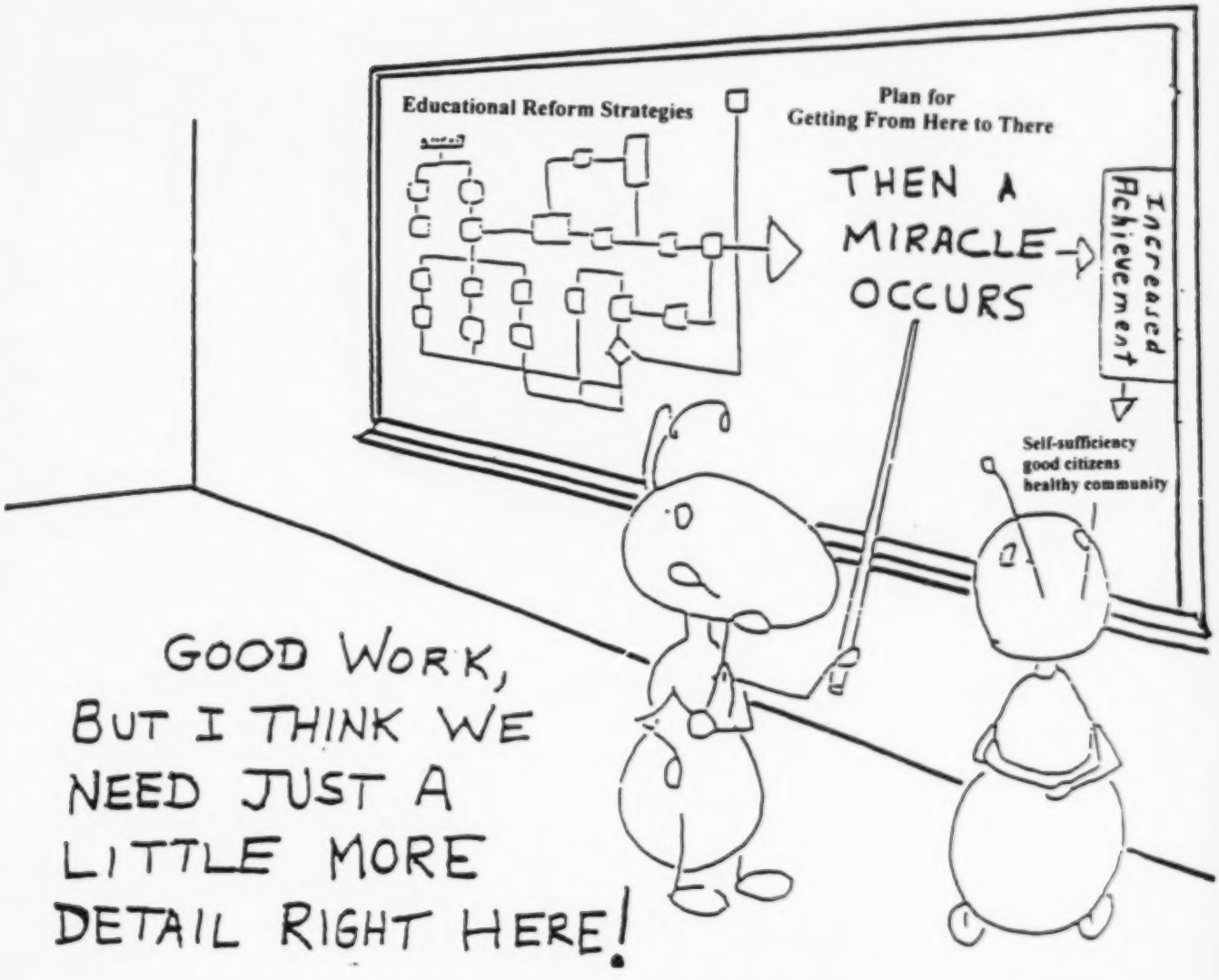
Concluding Comments

As school boards strive to improve schools, the primary emphasis is on high standards, high expectations, assessment, accountability, and no excuses. These are all laudable guidelines for reform. They are simply not sufficient.

It is time for school boards to deal more effectively with the reality that, by themselves, the best instructional reforms cannot produce desired results when large numbers of students are not performing well. It is essential to enhance the way every school site addresses barriers to learning and teaching. Each school needs policy support to help evolve a comprehensive, multifaceted, and well-integrated approach for addressing barriers and for doing so in ways that weave the work seamlessly with the school's efforts to enhance instruction and school management.

Progress along these lines is hampered by the marginalized status of programs and personnel whose primary focus is on enabling learning by effectively addressing barriers. Most school boards do not have a standing committee that focuses exclusively on this arena of policy and practice. The absence of such a structural mechanism makes it difficult to focus powerfully and cohesively on improving the way current resources are used and hinders exploring the best ways to evolve the type of comprehensive and multifaceted approaches that are needed to produce major gains in student achievement.

The Change Process



(author unknown)

Obviously, systemic change can't wait for miracles! School boards can play a key role in creating solid plans for both educational reform and how to get from here to there.

Appendix

Needed: A Comprehensive, Multifaceted Continuum of Intervention

Policy-oriented discussions increasingly recognize the importance of multifaceted approaches that account for social, economic, political, and cultural factors that can interfere with development, learning, and teaching (Adelman & Taylor, 1993; California Department of Education, 1997; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1996, 1997; Dryfoos, 1998; Schorr, 1997). As portrayed in Figure A-1, major policies and practices for addressing such barriers can be categorized into five areas: (1) measures to abate economic inequities/restricted opportunities, (2) primary prevention and early age interventions, (3) identification and amelioration of learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems as early as feasible, (4) ongoing amelioration of mild-moderate learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems, and (5) ongoing treatment of and support for chronic/severe/ pervasive problems.

As also illustrated in Figure A-1 and elaborated in Figures A-2 and A-3, the range of interventions can be appreciated by grouping them on a continuum from broadly focused primary prevention and approaches for treating problems early-after-onset through to narrowly focused treatments for severe/chronic problems. Such a continuum should encompass a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated continuum of community and school programs serving local geographical or catchment areas. Furthermore, it should reflect a holistic and developmental emphasis. The range of interventions focus on individuals, families, and the contexts in which they live, work, and play. A basic assumption is that the least restrictive and nonintrusive forms of intervention required to address problems and accommodate diversity should be used. Another assumption is that many problems are not discrete, and therefore, interventions that address root causes can minimize the trend to develop separate programs for every observed problem.

The potential array of preventive and treatment programs is extensive and promising. Figure A-3 provides examples of relevant interventions (all of which imply systemic changes). These are grouped under six types of activities along the prevention to treatment continuum: (1) primary prevention to promote and maintain safety and physical and mental health, (2) preschool programs, (3) early school adjustment programs, (4) improvement and augmentation of regular support, (5) specialized staff development and interventions prior to referral for special help, and (6) intensive treatments. Included are programs designed to promote and maintain safety and wellness at home and at school, programs for economic enhancement,

quality day care and early education, a wide range of supports to enable students to learn and teachers to teach, prereferral interventions, and systems of care for those with severe and chronic problems. Gaps in the continuum of programs can be clarified through analyses of social, economic, political, and cultural factors associated with the problems of youth and from needs assessments and reviews of promising practices.

Unfortunately, implementation of the full continuum of programs with an extensive range of activities does not occur in most communities that must rely on underwriting from public funds and private organizations supported by charitable donations. Moreover, what programs are in place tend to be fragmented. And this means there is not the type of systemic collaboration that is essential to establishing interprogram connections on a daily basis and over time. Ultimately, such a continuum must include *systems of prevention, systems of early intervention* to address problems as soon after onset as feasible, and *systems of care* for those with chronic and severe problems (again see Figure A-2). And each of these systems must be connected effectively. For example, the range of programs cited in Figure A-3 can be seen as integrally related, and it seems likely that the impact of each could be exponentially increased through integration and coordination. Such connections may involve horizontal and vertical restructuring (a) between jurisdictions, school and community agencies, public and private sectors; among schools; among community agencies; and (b) within jurisdictions, school districts, and community agencies (e.g., among departments, divisions, units, schools, clusters of schools)

In recent years, policy makers have been concerned about the relationship between limited intervention efficacy and the widespread tendency for complementary programs to operate in isolation. For instance, physical and mental health programs generally are not coordinated with educational programs, and programs are not coordinated over time. A youngster identified and treated in early education programs who still requires special support may or may not receive systematic help in the primary grades; and so forth. Failure to coordinate and follow through, of course, can be counterproductive (e.g., undermining immediate benefits and working against efforts to reduce subsequent demand for costly treatment programs). Limited efficacy seems inevitable as long as interventions are carried out in a piecemeal fashion. Indeed, a major breakthrough in the battle against learning, behavior, and emotional problems may result only when the full range of programs are implemented in a comprehensive and integrated fashion. Thus, there is increasing interest in moving beyond piecemeal strategies to provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated programmatic thrust (e.g., Adelman, 1993, 1996a, 1996b; Adelman & Taylor, 1997a; Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Hodgkinson, 1989; Kagan, 1990; Sailor & Skrtic, 1996).

Figure A-1. Addressing barriers to development, learning, and teaching: A continuum of five fundamental areas for analyzing policy and practice.

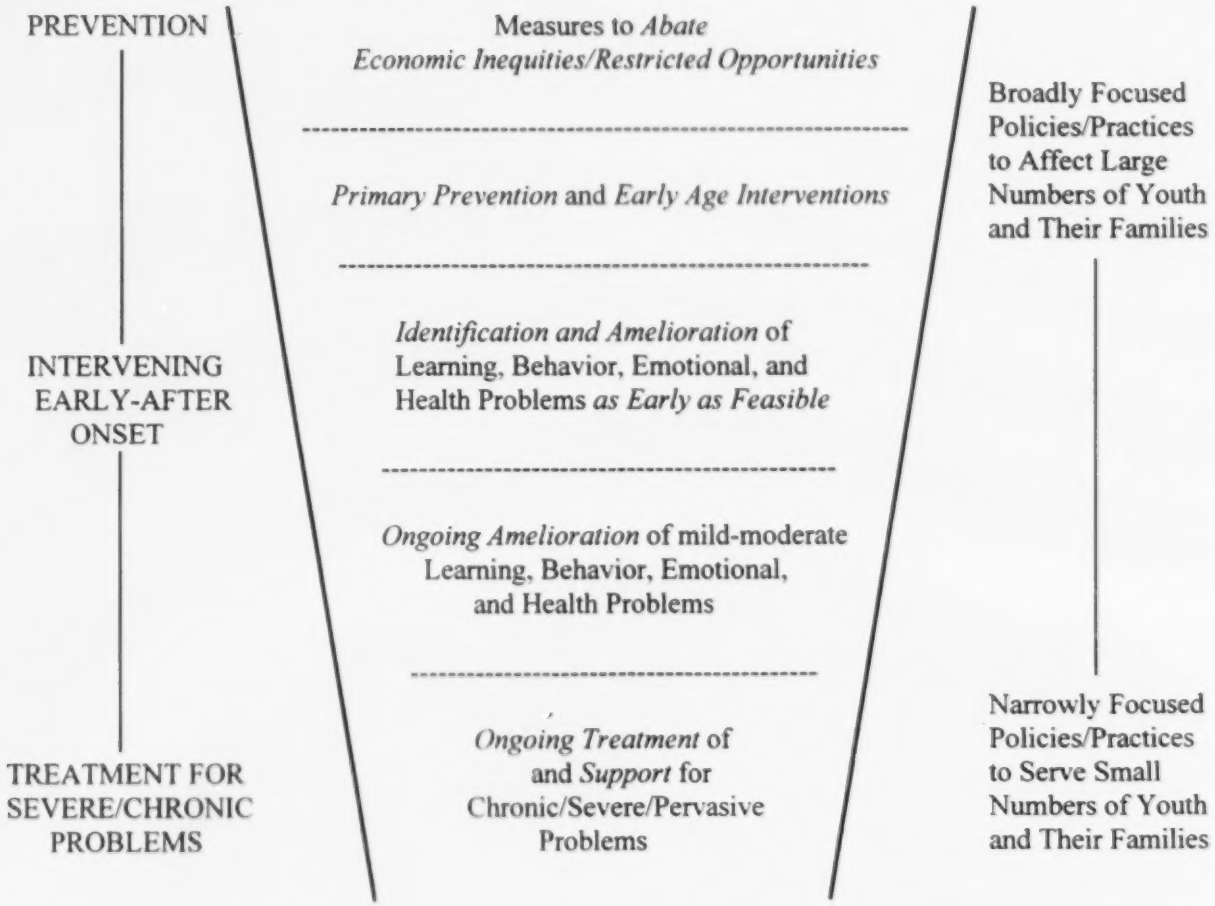

PREVENTION
INTERVENING EARLY-AFTER ONSET
TREATMENT FOR SEVERE/CHRONIC PROBLEMS
Measures to *Abate* *Economic Inequities/Restricted Opportunities*
Primary Prevention and *Early Age Interventions*
Identification and Amelioration of Learning, Behavior, Emotional, and Health Problems *as Early as Feasible*
Ongoing Amelioration of mild-moderate Learning, Behavior, Emotional, and Health Problems
Ongoing Treatment of and *Support* for Chronic/Severe/Pervasive Problems
Broadly Focused Policies/Practices to Affect Large Numbers of Youth and Their Families
Narrowly Focused Policies/Practices to Serve Small Numbers of Youth and Their Families

Figure A-2. Interconnected systems for meeting the needs of all students.

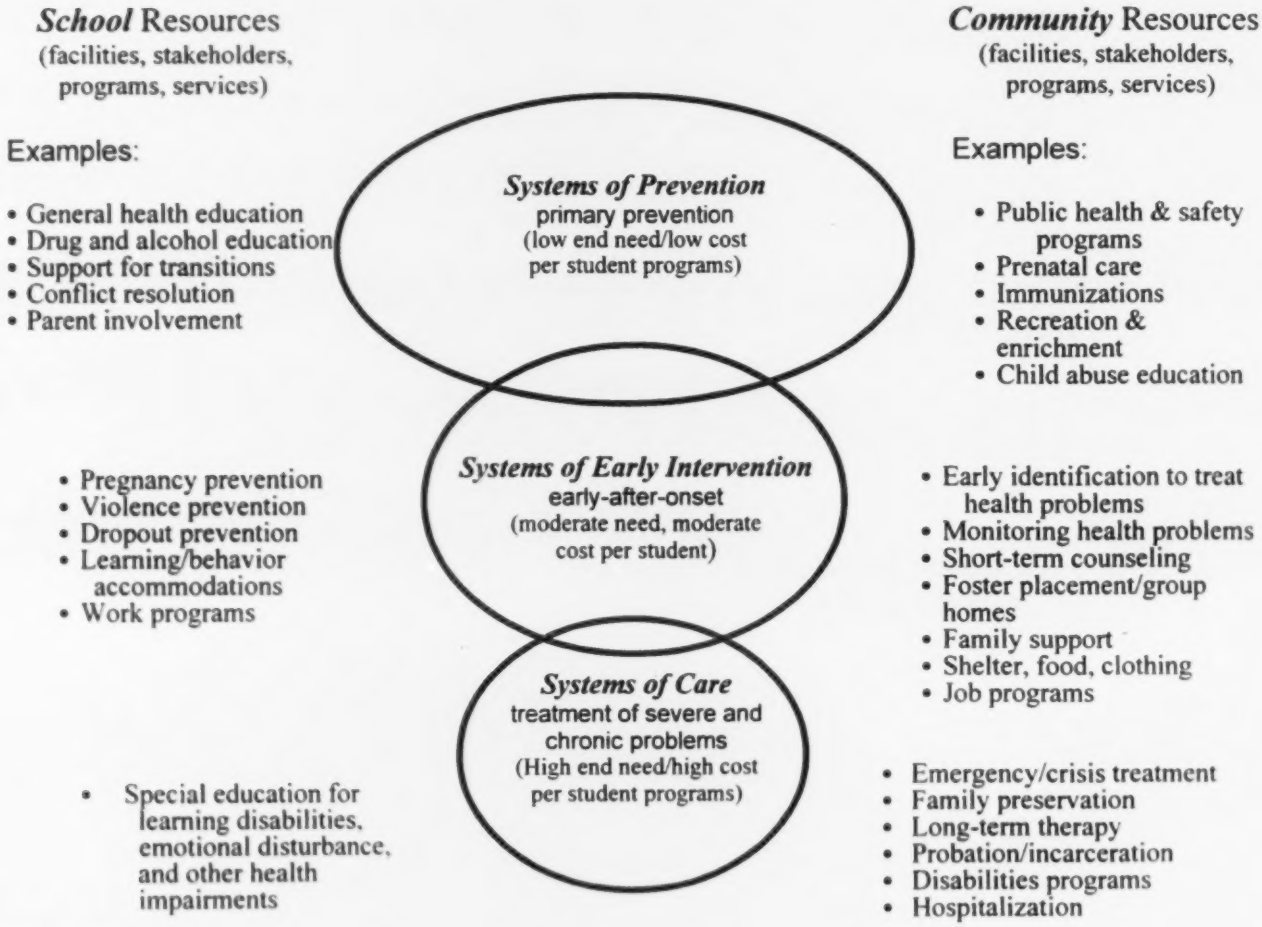


Figure A-3. From Primary Prevention to Treatment of Serious Problems: A Continuum of Community-School Programs

Intervention Continuum	*Examples of Focus and Types of Intervention* (Programs and services aimed at system changes and individual needs)
Primary prevention	1. *Public health protection, promotion, and maintenance to foster opportunities, positive development, and wellness* • economic enhancement of those living in poverty (e.g., work/welfare programs) • safety (e.g., instruction, regulations, lead abatement programs) • physical and mental health (incl. healthy start initiatives, immunizations, dental care, substance abuse prevention, violence prevention, health/mental health education, sex education and family planning, recreation, social services to access basic living resources, and so forth)
Early-after-onset intervention	2. *Preschool-age support and assistance to enhance health and psychosocial development* • systems' enhancement through multidisciplinary team work, consultation, and staff development • education and social support for parents of preschoolers • quality day care • quality early education • appropriate screening and amelioration of physical and mental health and psychosocial problems
	3. *Early-schooling targeted interventions* • orientations, welcoming and transition support into school and community life for students and their families (especially immigrants) • support and guidance to ameliorate school adjustment problems • personalized instruction in the primary grades • additional support to address specific learning problems • parent involvement in problem solving • comprehensive and accessible psychosocial and physical and mental health programs (incl. a focus on community and home violence and other problems identified through community needs assessment)
	4. *Improvement and augmentation of ongoing regular support* • enhance systems through multidisciplinary team work, consultation, and staff development • preparation and support for school and life transitions • teaching "basics" of support and remediation to regular teachers (incl. use of available resource personnel, peer and volunteer support) • parent involvement in problem solving • resource support for parents-in-need (incl. assistance in finding work, legal aid, ESL and citizenship classes, and so forth) • comprehensive and accessible psychosocial and physical and mental health interventions (incl. health and physical education, recreation, violence reduction programs, and so forth) • Academic guidance and assistance • Emergency and crisis prevention and response mechanisms
	5. *Other interventions prior to referral for intensive, ongoing targeted treatments* • enhance systems through multidisciplinary team work, consultation, and staff development • short-term specialized interventions (including resource teacher instruction and family mobilization; programs for suicide prevention, pregnant minors, substance abusers, gang members, and other potential dropouts)
Treatment for severe/chronic problems	6. *Intensive treatments* • referral, triage, placement guidance and assistance, case management, and resource coordination • family preservation programs and services • special education and rehabilitation • dropout recovery and follow-up support • services for severe-chronic psychosocial/mental/physical health problems

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